

Alexandria Gazette

VOL. XCI

ALEXANDRIA, VA., THURSDAY EVENING, JANUARY 30, 1890

NO. 26.

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[Entered at the Postoffice, Alexandria, Virginia, as

second-class matter.]

Character.

The following extracts are from Rev. Mr. Vazo's sermon (Philippians 4:8) delivered in the Second Presbyterian Church last Sunday morning:

Some twelve or fifteen years ago two young men went from the same town to the same college. Each gifted with much more than average ability, having enjoyed the same intellectual training, chose the same profession—the law—and both faced the world, commonly speaking, with the same possibilities of obtaining distinction. Today one of them is a judge, the other a convict.

What made the difference? Evidently not the environment, for in each case it was substantially the same. Undoubtedly the cause of the difference was internal, a difference of soul, of moral appetites, of ideals, of character. Under the power of these divergent tastes and aspirations, the two lives inevitably gravitated in different directions.

One started in life by giving his heart to Christ. Under the influence of that act his ideals became Christlike, and, as the lark mounts to sing his morning lay at heaven's gate, his life rose. The other drank a little, played some, killed time in odd moments by reading vile literature, gathered a class of dissipated fellows around him, scrupled not to avail himself of dishonorable and dishonest methods in the practice of his profession, soon degenerated into a veritable slyster, one night stabbed a man to death; and thus rapidly, naturally and necessarily went to the dogs. It was not bad luck. It was cause and effect, as much so as when small-pox disfigures and kills.

Character creates destiny, character establishes reputation, character seeks its level as naturally as water. Hence the most momentous question that ever asks for consideration and careful treatment is that which pertains to the formation of character. The soul is so delicate that the slightest touch leaves its impression. It is like the ivory petals of the magnolia that discolor from the slightest unkindly blow. Nothing leaves us as it found us. We are undergoing a constant metamorphosis. Every book read, every act performed, every thought entertained, every habit indulged, every friendship cemented, all the accidents and actions of life mingle with our being, merge into our identity, become part of our life current. Therefore, watch what touches your soul.

And yet, just here, perhaps, carelessness is most frequent. Few people care to reflect. The average young man goes in for a good time, regardless of consequences. He is always ready to dispense with advice; is like a great many older people who would rather give it than take it. After all it is not so strange to see a young man, the horizon of whose life is limited by the next hop; a young woman perplexed and harassed to distraction over what she will wear at the next "Assembly;" a man selling himself for business success; his wife blown about as a weathercock by the fickle fancies of fashion, living for petty social triumphs and moving in a sphere only big enough to hold the grievances and jealousies of yesterday and the plans and aspirations and possible social victories of tomorrow. Not so strange because a great many of us are caught by the looks of a thing.

There are some things that make men and some things that destroy men—poisons and elixirs in every chemist's laboratory, and deadly acids as well as elixirs of life in the great laboratory to which a human soul has access. God has left it with man as to whether he will take poison or health into his soul, but begs him to choose life.

Every life has large possibilities within it. It all depends upon the material which one uses. The icicle on your window sill forms drop by drop, slowly freezing until at length it hangs there sparkling as the sunbeams, like jets of fire, dance through its crystals, encircling that slender finger of the ice-king with bands of gold bejeweled with gems touched into living light by the master lapidarian. Thus sparkles that bit of ice, provided the water was clear when the icicle formed; but if the water was muddy, the ice is foul and the finger of flashing fire is changed into a dull, dead image of insensate clay.

Character forms like ice. Precisely the same process makes the judge that makes the criminal. The difference lies in the materials assimilated. One incorporates honor, truth, justice, and he shines with the glory thereof. Another incorporates vice, trash, dirt, and he sinks to the level of what he himself is.

The call of the text is a clarion note summoning men and women to noble lives. Men cannot afford to linger with what makes him pusillanimous of soul. "Be a man!" is the cry of his better genius, and whatever keeps him back from that goal is a positive injury. Life is too short, the interests involved too weighty, the impressions left too lasting to admit of any trifling here. He needs things "true, honest, just, pure, lovely, of good report;" for they hold all that is virtuous and praiseworthy in manhood, womanhood.

Truth, the backbone of character, that which keeps it upright. Honesty, the bone and sinew of character. Its station, justice, the equippage of character, the symmetry of the soul. Purity, the health of character, which keeps the complexion clear, the pulse steady, the life vigorous. Loveliness, or loveliness, the grace and beauty, the flesh and blood of character; that which takes away the hardness and sharpness of the iron and, without decreasing strength, makes character soft and tender. Good report, the atmosphere of character, ever fresh and moving with the unsought but ready homage which the world unconsciously bestows upon a nature true, honest, just, pure, lovely.

"Think on these things." It is worth ones while to strive with might and main for

them. They may not be showy, but they are solid. They can stand the wear and tear of time. They comfort with the dignity of one created in the image of God. Swine may wallow in the mire and be at home there, but God made man for something higher. He made him for an unpolished, an unstained, an incorruptible life; and through His Son, Jesus Christ, offers the power and pattern of such a life.

"Think on these things." Think on them in such a way that you shall know them, do them. Think on them until yourself shall be them. After all they are the things which make us genuinely happy and contented. Through them comes the Lord's message of "peace" to distracted conscience. The character composed of these principles is like a tower of granite. Let the wind blow as fiercely as it may, let the storm beat, let the thunders crash around it, and the lightning play upon it, still there it stands, like the everlasting rock, unmoved, immovable.

"Think on these things." They command the admiration and respect of ones fellow-men. Sometimes the opinion of the world goes wrong for a moment and pays homage to the trickster and trifler, but she is a wise old world and it isn't long until she discovers her mistake and rectifies it. Her heartiest and most loyal homage she lays at the feet of principle. The world admires honesty, integrity, loftiness of soul, honor. We pay willing tribute to him who can't be bought, who will not swerve from the line of truth and duty, who counts right of larger value than success.

Solid character commands respect. "Knowledge is power," said the sage. "Character is power," says God. Who are the solid, substantial, leading, ruling men in every civilized community? Not the men of brags or the men of wealth so much as the men of character. The public instinct knows that intellect may become tricky, wealth treacherous, but character stands like the pillars of Hercules. What is the most resplendent fact in the career of England's greatest living statesman? Mr. Gladstone is a man of vigorous mind, devoted courage, cosmopolitan statesmanship; but larger than any and all of these is his untarnished honesty, his unchallenged integrity. An unscrupulous man winks slyly at a young man and says: "You must give me good measure; your master is not in." The lad draws himself up, and, looking squarely into the man's face, replies: "My master is always in." And we say "Three cheers for a boy like that." He will make his mark. He will be a man. There is lots of room in the world for such as he. The world needs such, and such the world will praise. Young men, with life opening before you, let me say that the voice of God comes to you at this juncture of your career and says: "If there be any praise in these things think on them."

Think on these things. They command the approval of Almighty God. Man lives forever, says an inspired oracle. He would enter eternity with something which these commands recognition. There are some things which in their nature can never perish. The breath of immortality is within them, and they are quick with the very life of God. Such are the things mentioned by Paul in the text. Truth is immortal. Honesty will never die. Purity, justice, loveliness—on the brow of such the Maker of all has placed the mark of imperishable life. They may change their forms. They may seem to sleep. Like the grains of wheat wrapped in Egyptian mummies, discovered by curious travelers, planted, and found to have lost none of their life through the long slumber of 3,000 years, these things may slumber in man-made graves, but by and by they come forth from the sepulchre of neglect with vitality unimpaired, having lost no more by their burial than did their Lord. Like Jesus they carry an unquenched life through the tomb, and like Him, mantled with ascension robes, they rise on clouds of divine glory to their throne and kingdom in the life eternal.

Truth will never perish. No more will the character of truth. Over these immortal virtues a voice, like that which floated on dove's wings to a lately baptized Messiah, is heard saying, "Follow me my beloved, in whom I am well pleased." Indeed, when at last we come to stand before Him who is to try all hearts, we shall find that He who sits on the throne is the deathless incarnation of things true, honest, just, pure, lovely and of good report.

He who can stand in the glory of that presence, clothed in the majesty of such a character need have no fear, no doubts. He is a kinsman of Him who sits on the throne. He has the incorruptible life of Christ, and as he listens for the word which is to publish his destiny like sweetest music of heaven will come from the Lord's own lips, "These are my brethren."

Truly the text sounds to me like an echo of that word of Jesus which years before had summoned the fishermen from their boats and nets on beautiful Gennesaret. "Follow me." "Follow me." The answering hills have split the message into fragments, but Paul has gathered these echoing voices together in this verse, and they are found to be the old words of the Savior, "Follow me," for the life that follows truth, honor, justice, purity, love, follows Jesus, is helped and guided by the spirit of the Christ and up to Christ's presence must go, even as the lily leans towards the light.

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